

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 128 298

95

SP 010 370

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TITLE Preservice Teachers as Agents of Change: An Experiment. Teacher Education Forum; Volume 4, Number 3.
INSTITUTION Indiana Univ., Bloomington. School of Education.
SPONS AGENCY Bureau of Educational Personnel Development (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Feb 76
GRANT OEG-0-72-0492-725
NOTE 11p.; For related documents, see SP 010 358-388
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; Education Majors; Effective Teaching; *Field Experience Programs; *Preservice Education; Program Development; Secondary Schools; *Teacher Education; *Vocational Development

ABSTRACT

This paper is a description of an undergraduate experiment initiated at the University of Texas at Arlington during the academic year 1974-75. The thrust of the experiment was to instill more realism in the professional courses at the Education Department and simultaneously to assist in instigating changes in the public schools. A document proposing the field experience program was submitted to persons within The Education Department. The proposal was sent to a subcommittee of a local teacher center, the local Advisory Council of Arlington, principals, and teachers. Personal interviews were arranged with principals in grades 7-12. Four basic questions were asked: (1) After having an opportunity to read the proposal, have you found any problem areas? (2) What particular aspects need to be addressed during the orientation? (3) What ways would you get feedback from teachers in your school? and (4) Would you want to participate in such a venture? The information was collected and revised in proposal form, and the program began in the spring of 1974. The experiment for many students was a positive experience, acting as a catalyst for making a more intelligent decision about teaching as a career. It also increased the university's sensitivity towards student needs, interests, feelings, ideas, and learning styles, and helped the public schools involved to actualize many programs. An appendix contains a preservice field experience program questionnaire. (DMT)

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Produced by the Division of Teacher Education, Indiana University-Bloomington, a component of the School of Education, supported in part by way of an Institutional Grant (OF-OEG: 0-72-0492:725) with funds from the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare—Office of Education, under the provisions of the Bureau of Educational Personnel Development as a project. The opinions expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Office of Education, and no official endorsement by the Office of Education should be inferred.

Preservice Teachers as Agents of Change: An Experiment

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February 1976

Volume 4

Number 3

Upon initial consideration it would seem that a group of neophyte would-be teachers are in no condition to assume any teaching responsibilities beyond the traditional "observation" period usually required over and above the regular class hours of methods, educational psychology, and of adolescent behavior. In a fairly strict sense, this is so. However, instigating change in any educational system, notwithstanding the public schools, requires a bit more manpower than any one teacher to the usual twenty to twenty-five students. Further, the subtle nuances of some change aspects require smaller group experiments, modular tryouts and learning center facilities, which together add up to noticeable change affecting the entire curriculum in some instances.

There was a two-fold reason for such an undergraduate experiment initiated at the University of Texas at Arlington during the academic year of 1974-75. First, the professional courses in the Education Department needed some realism added beyond the mere theory of how young people learn. Instead of learning about children and the way they react to instruction, the undergraduates were seeing all of this taking place at first hand. They saw the textbook come to life before their very eyes; they also saw deviations which the text never mentioned. By utilizing public school classrooms as laboratory sites rather than the contrived situations of college classrooms, the prospective teacher was shown that public schools are changing faster than institutions of higher learning which prepare the teachers for these schools. Furthermore, through participation in the preservice program, the future teacher nurtured more realistic perceptions about teaching behavior and achieved an increased readiness for student teaching and full-time teaching.

The second reason for the experiment, and perhaps more apropos to this paper, is that some drastic changes were implemented in the public school curriculum. The availability of two, three, or even four willing assistants to the classroom teacher helped to individualize instruction through their answering specific questions, motivating underachievers, and perhaps challenging "exceptional" students with new concepts. It often has been said that it is pedagogically sound to meet each student on his own turf; with college student aides this approach can be greatly facilitated or refined. Then, too, experimentation with current instructional schemes such as continuous progress, nongraded, and spiral curriculum programs could be implemented or reinforced. Yet another change was in the area of cooperation. In this experiment education was no longer the sole domain of the public schools, but rather a shared experience with the University. Supervised preservice activity thus has fostered a wholesome and more unified spirit for future innovations and exploration.

Before continuing, a brief explanation of the procedures taken to initiate such a program is in order. A document proposing a field experience program was submitted to colleagues within the Department for comments, additions and/or deletions. The major divisions of the document included a justification;

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objectives; the course it was to be a part of; the place of the experience; procedures including a section on responsibilities of the student helper; orientation sessions with principals, college instructors, and teachers; visitations to other schools; evaluation instruments; and follow-up programs to be conducted during the field work. It soon became apparent that blueprints for such a program could not be formulated in a vacuum; consequently, it was the consensus of the department to seek input from the public school community. The Proposal was sent to the Committee for Laboratory Experiences (a sub-committee of a local teacher center), the Local Advisory Council of Arlington, principals, and teachers. In the meeting with the Committee on Laboratory Experiences the sharing of ideas brought further alternations. A revised copy was then sent to the Local Advisory Council. Personal interviews were arranged with the principals in grades 7-12. This part of the data collecting took about one month and four basic questions were asked: (1) After having had an opportunity to read the Proposal, have you found problem areas? (2) What particular aspects need to be stressed during the orientations? (3) What ways would you get feedback from teachers in your school? and (4) Would you want to participate in such a venture? The final phase rested with the teachers and feedback from them was obtained through various means, for example meeting with teachers during their planning periods, distributing Proposals with cover letters to department heads or principals, or meeting informally with teachers after school hours.

With this information in the form of a revised proposal, a pilot program was launched in spring 1974 encompassing a limited number of students. In the fall plans were made to include more students in the preservice program and a meeting was held with interested educators. At this meeting the principal of Maude V. Roark Elementary School in Arlington enthusiastically endorsed the aide program and offered her school as the laboratory site. She also took on the full responsibility of accommodating all of the UTA Methods' students. It was from this and three future groups of students that the data for this study were collected. The following information has been derived from an especially designed questionnaire (See Appendix) completed by the college students participating in the program.

For many, the experience was a positive one, the catalyst for making a more intelligent decision about teaching as a career; for others the reaction was less positive, but in both situations changes have occurred within the individuals and within the public schools.

In the former case, the changes were internal, namely attitudinal, philosophical, and intellectual. For example, the degree of sensitivity toward the pupils' needs, interests, feelings, ideas, and individual learning styles had increased for more than three-quarters of those polled. Interest in the teaching profession was increased greatly for better than half of the students. For 73 per cent of the respondents the accepting of pupil differences and dealing with each pupil in a unique way at least increased and/or greatly increased. Philosophically and intellectually most of these students could probably define what positive reinforcement means and 56 per cent saw how it was applied and how it was an integral part of the teaching-learning process.

For some of these college aides the experience was a stepping stone from the cold, impersonal college classroom to the more warm, invigorating public schools with their real pupils, real teachers, real materials, and real problems. The basic principle, that pupils learn at different rates regardless of their ages, cannot be taught with meaning until it is experienced first hand.

These changes within the future teachers are difficult to quantify, but it is the intangible many times that makes the difference in education; comprehension is what counts. A number of neophytes found master teachers they admired and wanted to emulate; others were surprised at the pupils' enthusiasm for learning; and many found involvement an important motivational tool. It can be concluded that in more than half of the participants there was personal and professional growth in the affective and cognitive domains.

The students experienced a sense of belonging when teachers welcomed them to their classrooms, feeling that these students might have something new to offer. The aides in the art block helped to enrich the program by introducing projects such as straw weaving, graphite rubbings, diazo blueprint paper, photograms, film making, and string painting. In some classes, these students were responsible for planning and implementing the units. Other students did clerical duties to release the classroom teacher to help small groups of pupils or vice versa. Individualizing was certainly an integral part of the physical education program where the less physically coordinated pupils were assisted by aides. Introducing a social studies lesson, explaining a language exercise, assisting pupils with mathematics problems, helping pupils to develop library skills, and demonstrating the position of the United States on the globe also are ways in which the college students have helped.

In conclusion a few positive statements concerning the utilization of preservice teachers as agents of change deserve emphasis. A major merit of the preservice experience is the mutual benefit derived by the public schools which found more help to actualize many programs, the college students who gained first-hand knowledge of child growth and development, and the University which is evolving an improved teacher preparation program, one which is more congruent with the learner taking on more responsibility for his education. And perhaps most importantly, realizing that neither the college students nor the public schools are exactly the same as a result of this experiment, the college students are confident about their career plans and the public schools are a little closer to achieving their ultimate goal of helping each child develop his individual potentialities.

APPENDIX

PRESERVICE FIELD EXPERIENCE PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE*

Directions: Please complete the following:

1. Date of birth: _____
2. Place of birth: City _____ State _____
3. Educational background: four years of high school Yes _____ No _____
three years of college Yes _____ No _____ Other _____
4. Female _____ Male _____
5. You were in _____ School.
6. You worked with _____ age group(s).
7. The time spent in this school was _____ hours per week from _____ to _____. (Total hours were _____.)

Directions: Please circle the most appropriate response on each scale and briefly explain your choice. All statements and questions refer to the laboratory time spent in the public school(s).
Do not sign your name; this information will be held in strict confidence.

I. Affective Inventory

1. Self-awareness of one's true feelings toward teaching has

1	2	3	4	5
Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
31.7	30.5	37.6	0	0

2. Receptivity to the ideas and suggestions of supervisors and classroom teachers has

1	2	3	4	5
Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
22.3	38.8	35.3	0	3.5

3. Sensitivity to the needs, interests, feelings, ideas, and individual learning style of the students has

1	2	3	4	5
Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
37.6	41.1	21.2	0	0

*For each item in this questionnaire, percentages of responses are recorded below the continuum categories. N = 85.

4. Ability to readily adapt to new situations has

1	2	3	4	5
Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
20.0	45.9	34.1	0	0

5. Level of self-confidence to meet challenges has

Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
27.0	36.5	33.0	3.5	0

6. Level of independence in carrying out weekly assignments in the school has

Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
9.5	31.8	58.9	0	0

7. Tolerance toward other people has

Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
23.5	25.9	48.2	1.2	1.2

8. Emotional poise in difficult situations has

Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
16.5	33.0	49.4	1.2	0

II. Involvement in the Learning Activities of Children

9. Interest in the teaching profession has

Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
40.0	29.4	29.4	1.2	0

10. Ability to convey ideas clearly to students in the classroom has

Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
10.6	48.2	41.2	0	0

11. Pupil reaction toward you as a "teacher" has

Improved greatly		Remained the same		Worsened greatly
15.3	43.5	35.3	1.2	0

12. Your respect for each child's work has

1	2	3	4	5
Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
35.3	34.1	28.2	2.4	0

13. Interaction with children has increased

To a large degree		To some degree		Not at all
27.1	37.6	33.0	2.4	0

14. Interest in the children with whom you worked has

Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
42.4	29.4	20.0	1.2	0

15. Acceptance of individual differences and dealing with each child in a unique way has

Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
28.2	48.2	23.5	0	0

16. Your ability to give praise to students when deserved has

Increased greatly		Remained the same		Decreased greatly
23.5	36.5	27.1	7.1	0

17. You have gained an understanding of child growth and development

To a large degree		To some degree		Not at all
27.1	28.2	37.6	5.9	1.2

18. You have learned to utilize questioning skills to foster inquiry

To a large degree		To some degree		Not at all
11.8	21.2	56.8	4.7	5.9

III. General

19. This preservice field experience has helped to close the gap between theory and practice of teaching

To a large degree		To some degree		Not at all
35.3	27.1	29.4	2.4	5.9

20. This field experience program was

1	2	3	4	5
Extremely worthwhile		Worthwhile		Worthless
45.9	21.2	25.9	5.9	1.2

21. The experiences encountered in the public school have enabled you to know your career potential better

To a large degree		To some degree		Not at all
20.0	35.3	35.3	4.7	4.7

22. Your participation in the preservice program will help ease your anxiety during student teaching

To a large degree		To some degree		Not at all
31.8	21.2	31.8	9.4	5.9

23. This experience has provided new insights into understanding elementary school children

To a large degree		To some degree		Not at all
33.0	27.1	33.0	5.9	0

24. This experience has helped you to better understand the teaching-learning process

To a large degree		To some degree		Not at all
23.5	24.7	45.9	5.9	0

25. This preservice will help you be a better student teacher

To a great degree		To some degree		Not at all
23.5	38.8	30.6	5.9	1.2

IV. Please answer the following questions:

26. How has this experience helped in providing insights into the behavior of secondary school students?

27. What did this preservice field experience program lack?

28. Did the classroom teachers accept you and your ideas as they would another teacher? If not, do you know why?